DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 170 253 SP 014 105

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TITLE	Future Directions for the National Institute of Education.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Task Force on Curriculum Development.
PUB DATE	Nov 76
NOTE	13p.; Paper prepared for the NIE Curriculum Development Task Force; for related documents, see SP 014 095-115, SP 014 185-186, ED 124 530, ED 140 401, and ED 144 217
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Cognitive Processes; Curriculum Development; Educational Television; Generalization; Government Role; *Intellectual Development; *Learning Processes; Learning Theories; *Research Utilization; *Teacher Education; *Teaching Skills; Thought Processes
IDENTIFIERS	National Institute of Education

ABSTRACT

Current teacher education is criticized, and suggestions are made for improvement. It is pointed out that an essential factor is missing from teacher education curriculum. This factor is the systematic translation of what is now known about human learning into teacher and learner behavior in the classroom. While the results of abundant research in the field of the learning process are available, they are not being put into practice by teacher educators. A learning how to learn curriculum is outlined as a basic teacher education course. The potential for using available educational television tools is discussed as a means of developing truly professional teachers. (JD)

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FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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A paper prepared for the
NIE Curriculum Development Task Force

November, 1976

SP 014 105

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

Equal access to educational opportunity for all Americans has been our paramount goal, yet shocking inequalities, throughout our educational system, continue to exist.

Why is this so? Most teachers continue to be dedicated, to spend long hours preparing for their students, to want to do a good job. Most school districts continue to build new buildings, to purchase the best equipment, books and programs available. State and federal funding continues to pour into support of personnel and programs for the disadvantaged, gifted, bilingual, handicapped, rural and urban students. Parents continue to ask for quality education.

All of these factors contribute to the improvement of education, but the most essential factor, has been conspicuous by its absence. That factor is the systematic translation of what is now known about human learning into teacher and learner behavior in the classroom. As a result, many potentially fine programs have been unpredictable or ineffective because, in their implementation, the teacher was using only intuition or was unintentionally violating basic principles of learning. As a result, students emerged without having achieved the intended goals or, even worse, were turned off by their

educational experiences.

There is no question but that there is an undefinable artistry in teaching, but there is equal certainty, established by research in human learning, that there is a science of instruction[1] on which teacher artistry must be based (either consciously or intuitively) if students are to learn predictably and successfully. That science of instruction emerges from identified principles of learning that are ubiquitous to successful educational programs regardless of content, delivery system, age, grade, socioeconomic or ethnic derivation of the learner.

Although validated by research, until recently those principles have remained an unorganized stockpile of potentially powerful generalizations. Organized into a basic teacher education curriculum, these principles hold the promise of solving many of the puzzles that have muddied the waters of curricular and organizational innovations.[2][3][4]

A teacher who is sophisticated in the use of these principles can predictably increase the probability of successful learning with any curriculum, whether the goal is enhancement of self-concept, respect for the rights and contributions of others, sophistication in the social sciences, capability in mathematics, investigation of one's values, or facility in reading.[5][6][7]

Consequently, the primary reasons for inequality in educational opportunity are not vested in funding, in materials and programs, in pupil-teacher ratio, in grouping patterns, school organization or in school buildings,

but inequalities are largely a direct result of the professional competence of the individual teacher. The student in a class with a well intended but inexpert teacher or professor, does not have the same educational opportunity as the student in the class next door with a highly proficient, competent, artistic teacher. It makes the inequality even more deplorable when one realizes that the artistry and competence of the proficient professional are not predictable outcomes of intentions or experience, but are learned skills in decision making which can and should be acquired in professional education programs.

Principles of learning are, in fact, so powerful that they should not remain the sole domain of the educator, but should also be developed into a curriculum for acquisition by students.

Students everywhere are exerting effort to learn, but nowhere (to the writer's knowledge) are students systematically learning how to learn more efficiently and effectively. As a result, we find students routinely using assembly line learning procedures unaware that they could know their own best learning modalities, the strategies that work for them the most productive way for them to become more motivated to learn, learn more rapidly, remember longer, and transfer that learning successfully to new situations. In short, although individualization of instruction is preached, students are not learning the skills to deal with the idiosyncratic dimensions of their own learning behavior.

"Learning how to learn" is surely a goal worthy of investment of time and energy for every learner in the world, something that cannot be said of many curricular ventures.

Having worked with professors, principals, and teachers in thousands of American classrooms, from preschool through university, it is the recommendation of this writer that the following three projects will not only fulfill the criteria of existence for the National Institute of Education, but if these projects are not accomplished, very little else of worth to education can be.

1. A Basic Teacher Education Curriculum

Research has been done that validates the efficacy of a teacher education curriculum based on principles of unlimited generalizability. There are adequate theories, reliable generalizations, and clear indices of action already available. In addition, there is abundant evidence of teachers' desire for and willingness to participate in a program generalizable to all teaching areas instead of the costly investment of time in a program with limited generalization to the multitude of teaching responsibilities inherent in every school day.

In the past, the professional skills of the teacher, the most critical controllable factor in student learning, have been a product of tradition. Recipes of what to do - not taking into account the circumstances, the learner and the context have produced routinized or rebellious "recipe followers" not professional decision makers. Teacher education curriculum has been the

focus of several agencies and institutions with the result of a patchwork of promising, colorful and original "pieces." Now it would seem appropriate for the NIE to create the master design which would weave those pieces into a tapestry of professionality where no one method or ideology became paramount, but where the undergirding generalizations from the research in human learning supplied the warp and welt of a professional education that would qualify one for the certification of teacher - "one whose decisions when implemented increase the probability of student learning in a productive direction."

As we look at past performance of the NIE, we find conceptually sound curricula which have been successful or unsuccessful on the basis of the teacher using them. Even those curricula must be tailored to learners, requiring a professional decision making skill which many teachers don't possess, but without that tailoring those curricular packages can be unsuitable.

While the curricular "what" of learning, the goal of instruction, is critically important, there is much more educational literacy in this area than there is in "how" that learning can be achieved. There is almost universal agreement that each learner has a right to be assisted to achieve his/her maximum potential as a human being, to develop a valid and positive self-concept, to acquire the tool skills of reading, writing and math commensurate to his/her life needs and which will make available the heritage of humankind, and to develop the interpersonal skills which enable him/her to

become an appreciated, contributing member of society. But how to achieve those agreed upon goals, remains a debate between the "scientists" whose research in laboratories gives them significant hints as to many of the elements which powerfully affect learning, the theoreticians whose conceptualizations of what the world of the classroom could be, given the optimum conditions for human learning and the practitioner whose knowledge of what the world of the classroom currently is, makes him/her look despairingly at the unbridged gap between theory and practice.

Certainly a critical area of research for the NIE would be to determine the reality of all three orientations and to effect a synthesis which would become the foundation for teacher education, not a series of "how to do it" recipes nor an ephemeral essay of what ought to be done, but a description of the research based science of education and how it can be used artistically by practitioners in their daily teaching decisions. An identification, if you will, of the nutrients that promote human learning, in the same way that the nutrients in food that promote health have been identified and thereby constitute the launching pad from which attractive, appetizing, health promoting meals can be derived; meals which will take into account the consumer's culture, preference and life style as well as the commodities available.

From the science of nutrition, the dietician or a mother can learn to develop a diet suitable for each individual, and the results of that diet can be tested. In the same way the educational "nutrients" which are under the control of the teacher, and which have a powerful effect on human learning

can become the substance for a curriculum of teacher education. Outcomes of this curriculum can be empirically tested as to their effect on achievement of any educational goal.

In keeping with the ability of technology to accommodate a massive need, the medium of television offers the promise of pervasive availability of this teacher education program to every area of the country. Television also makes possible the experiencing, vicariously, safely and successfully, of the best in teaching rather than the distortion which often results from direct initial experience with any new venture. Watching a televised teacher education program in which are imbedded the principles of learning that are being taught (an innovation indeed!), learning about the use of those principles in a classroom and then observing master teachers apply those principles in a variety of educational settings using different content, different organizational plans and delivery systems, with learners of all ages and ethnic derivations, brings into high visibility, through both direct and vicarious experience, the wide generalizability of basic psychological principles.

No simple venture this, but it can be done. (8) A forward looking program of teacher education which would serve the nation both in terms of the program's consonance with what is now known about increasing human learning and the program's availability to every teacher regardless of geography, politics or finance would be a venture worthy of the NIE.

2. A Teacher-of-Teachers Curriculum

While a tremendous spurt in professional competence could be generated by a televised teacher education program, television could not accomplish the individuation needed for maximum realization of potential by each professional. A human is needed to accomplish this "custom-tailoring." Consequently, professors, principals, supervisors and others responsible for continuing professional growth also need a curriculum designed to increase their effectiveness. Obviously, those in teacher education positions must know, at an implementation level, the content of the teacher education program, but additional clinical skills must continually be sharpened in order to help teachers teach more effectively. While the principles of learning remain the same, the vocabulary and delivery systems must be adapted to the dynamics of a continuously growing professional rather than the achievement of a more static level of competence in a content area.

The criticality of the school principal is well documented. Equipping the on-site administrator with the skills essential to the growth and/or remediation of teachers would provide the built-in renewal that is now so conspicuously lacking in the nation's schools.

3. A "Learning How to Learn" Curriculum

A third and much more difficult curricular venture, because the research has not yet been systematically applied at this level, is a student

curriculum which would have as its goal "learning how to learn." We are teaching students about their bodies, their emotions and their social interaction patterns, but we are not teaching them about how they learn. What could be more useful information throughout a lifetime where the need for continuing learning is an undisputed prediction?

While research in learning is available for use by developers of a "learning curriculum," many questions remain to be answered. When should such a curriculum be introduced? As early as possible? Or will waiting for additional maturity speed successful assimilation and acquition of learning potency? What content lends itself most successfully to this process acquition? Should learning in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains be the objectives of separate focus or should those domains be utilized in concert to best demonstrate that the learning process is the same in each? Under what conditions and with which learners are different modes and methodologies most effective? How can a curriculum of "learning how to learn" be designed and implemented to more nearly ensure its transfer to every facet of life rather than remaining a fascinating but myopic classroom exercise, the fate of so many process skills? Clearly, this curriculum would necessitate major research, experimentation, materials production, field-testing and evaluation far beyond a curriculum for teachers and teacher educators. The effort and cost, however, could easily be defended in terms of lifelong value and utility for every learner in the world. Having learned

how to learn, efficiently and effectively, would constitute a major step in the achievement of equality of educational opportunity for all learners.

In conclusion, the "lessons" the writer has learned from direct participation at the classroom level in the educational system of America are:

Teacher education is hopelessly obsolete and nonfunctional. As a result, all educational effort is blunted.

It is possible to develop a basic curriculum for preservice and inservice teacher education which is generated by current research in human learning and which is generalizable to all who teach.

The task of continuous professional development of the teacher in the field is so herculean that only by the use of media can it ever hope to be accomplished.

"Learning about learning" is an essential curriculum which can fit a pluralistic society and which will contribute significantly to equal access to educational opportunity for <u>every</u> student, <u>every</u> teacher and <u>every</u> educational administrator.

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